



Montgomery County Council

From the office of Councilmember Marilyn Praisner

News Release**July 26, 2001**

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Praisner Hails Reduction in County's Infant Mortality Rate

Councilmember Marilyn J. Praisner today expressed her enthusiasm with the 37 percent reduction in Montgomery County's overall infant mortality rate from 1999 to 2000 and a 44 percent reduction in African American infant mortality. The State of Maryland yesterday released figures that show Montgomery County is one of the leaders in the State's successful effort, which achieved its lowest level ever for infant mortality.

Dr. Carol Garvey, Montgomery County's chief health officer, credited the Baby Steps program, which was championed by Praisner, as a key component in reducing infant mortality here. Baby Steps is an outreach program offering voluntary screenings to all new mothers that deliver babies in County hospitals.

"This proves that helping new mothers assure their babies get a healthy start truly makes a difference," said Praisner. "This is what we set out to accomplish - healthier babies that can grow into strong youngsters ready for school and a brighter future."

The Baby Steps screenings identify specific needs and refer the mother and baby to community services. It has been shown that giving new mothers the resources they need right from the start helps assure healthier, more well-adjusted children. Garvey noted that improvements in children's health programs have contributed to this significant reduction in infant mortality.

Montgomery County's infant mortality rate shrank from 7.0 to 4.4 deaths per 1,000 in 1999 to 4.4 in 2000. Infant mortality for African Americans dropped from 17.4 deaths per 1,000 in 1999 to 9.7 in 2000.

Also influential is the work of the African American Infant Mortality Coalition, which alerted the community to the high infant mortality in blacks and has worked to address factors believed to affect infant mortality. The County's African Health Initiative, funded by the Council, has targeted infant mortality as one of its focuses.

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